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ABSTRACT

This document consists of two booklets from an educational packet to accompany the museum exhibition "Sharing Traditions: Five Black Artists in Nineteenth-Century America." One of the booklets is an artists' notebook containing biographical and archival information on artists Joshua Johnson, Robert Scott Duncanson, Edward Mitchell Bannister, Henry Ossawa Tanner, and sculptress Edmonia Lewis. The second booklet consists of reproductions originally included in the packet, a list of questions intended to stimulate classroom discussion, and a selected bibliography to guide interested students to additional reading. The resource material was developed to enhance student experience and may be used in the classroom for preparation before a tour or for review after a visit to the exhibit. The components were designed to heighten the students' perceptual awareness of the artists' paintings and sculpture and to encourage examination of the individual lives of the artist. They provide insights into the historical, social, and cultural context of being black, being an American, and being an artist in nineteenth century America. (DK)

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Study Guide

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Sharing Traditions: Five Black Artists in Nineteenth-Century America
From the Collections of the National Museum of American Art
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

SO 024 312

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Cover:

HENRY OSSAWA TANNER (1859–1937)
Abraham's Oak, 1905
Oil on canvas, 21⅝ x 28⅝ in. (54.4 x 72.8 cm.)
Gift of Norman Robbins
National Museum of American Art
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Study Guide

Sharing Traditions

FIVE BLACK ARTISTS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

From the Collections of the National Museum of American Art
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Guy C. McElroy

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Foreword

Just as it is hard to define an American tradition within the context of European-inspired styles, it is doubly difficult to identify an early tradition of Afro-American art which is distinct. To an astonishing degree, black Americans adopted an artistic vocabulary of subjects and styles derived from European examples. Afro-Americans, like other Americans, channeled their artistic intentions into painting or sculpture according to the taste of their time. Recognition was slow, but when it came — as with Edward Mitchell Bannister's first-class medal at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia — it was won not in a separate category, but in a wide field of international competition.

Black American artists labored under even greater hardships than their white counterparts; for the most part, they lacked not only academies, museums, and patrons, but also social and economic opportunities for advancement. In spite of these deprivations, they too sought recognition within the international art community. Only now are we discovering their remarkable achievements — enduring testimony to every people's need for artistic expression.

The pioneering exhibition, *Sharing Traditions: Five Black Artists in Nineteenth-Century America*, explores these issues through the art of five individuals and introduces as well the significant collection of Afro-American art at the National Museum of American Art. More than two hundred paintings, sculptures, and drawings by the artists in this exhibition were transferred within the Smithsonian Institution to this museum from the National Museum of African Art when that agency began to focus exclusively on the art of continental Africa.

The exhibition will be inaugurated here in Washington and will be on view in numerous museums across the country during a three-year tour under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. The educational material published in conjunction with this exhibition was made possible through the generous support of Chesebrough-Pond's Inc. We sincerely hope that viewing these works of art will inspire young artists and instill pride in all Americans who share this rich heritage and tradition.

Charles C. Eldredge
Director
National Museum of American Art
Smithsonian Institution

Dear Teacher

To complement the exhibition, *Sharing Traditions: Five Black Artists in Nineteenth-Century America*, the National Museum of American Art is pleased to present this educational packet which we hope will help promote better inter-cultural understanding through the visual arts. As the exhibition tours numerous institutions throughout the country over the next three years, thousands of students will have the opportunity to view the creative efforts of these five artists and appreciate their valuable contribution to America's artistic heritage.

This resource material has been developed to enhance the students' experience; it can be used in the classroom for preparation before the tour or for review after the visit.

The components were designed to heighten the students' perceptual awareness of the artists' paintings and sculpture and to encourage examination of their individual lives; they provide insights into the historical, social, and cultural context of being black, being an American, and being an artist in nineteenth-century America.

Included are:

— An *Artists' Notebook* containing biographical and archival information.

— Five color reproductions of works in the exhibition.

— This *Study Guide* with commentaries on the five reproductions, a list of questions intended to stimulate classroom discussion, and a selected bibliography to guide interested students to additional reading.

We hope you will find this interdisciplinary approach helpful and adaptable to your own curriculum.

We are indebted to Guy McElroy, who wrote the text for both booklets; to Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, the curator of the exhibition, for her scholarly assistance; and to the staff of the Smithsonian Office of Elementary and Secondary Education for their guidance. We also gratefully acknowledge the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service for arranging the extended tour of the exhibition, for encouraging the publication of this packet, and for overseeing its national distribution.

Nora Panzer
Head, Docent and Volunteer Services
Office of Public Programs
National Museum of American Art
Smithsonian Institution

Joshua Johnson
(active 1796–1824)

Sea Captain John Murphy, ca. 1810
Oil on canvas, 21½ x 17½ in. (54.6 x 44.5 cm.)
Gift of Leonard and Paula Granoff
National Museum of American Art
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Joshua Johnson painted portraits of many of Baltimore's well-to-do families at a time when few black artists achieved success. His sitters included merchants, seamen, and their families, painted in the stiff, formal poses befitting their dignity and station in life. Although he was a limner, an untrained painter of portraits, Johnson created skillful and sensitive portrayals which show us that he was aware of the artistic styles fashionable during his lifetime.

Johnson's portrait, *Sea Captain John Murphy*, is a companion piece intended to be hung by the side of a painting of his wife, Barbara Baker Murphy, illustrated in the *Artists' Notebook*. Prior to the advent of photography in the middle of the nineteenth century, it was common practice for those who could afford it to commission portraits of family members. These likenesses became family treasures that were passed down from generation to generation as records of the family's ancestry and status. A portrait of a sea captain was especially important as a tangible reminder of the husband or father who was away on long and dangerous journeys.

The captain is represented in a three-quarter view. His earnest eyes and sensitive mouth suggest a man of integrity. He wears a black, high-collared coat with a white cravat. Johnson has carefully indicated the bright brass buttons of the coat and has captured the captain's tousled hair and sheer cravat with delicate brush strokes — examples of the artist's delight in fine details. The portrait is enclosed in a painted oval, and the rich red background gives a strong contrast to the dark coat and pale features of the sitter. The flat background, sparse details, and limited color scheme draw the viewer's attention to the direct gaze of this serious man.

While some of Johnson's portraits have the stiffness and irregular proportions seen in the work of self-taught artists, his image of the captain demonstrates insights and technical skills equal to those of other successful limners who were active as professional painters in the early years of the nineteenth century.

Robert Scott Duncanson
(1821/22-1872)

Landscape with Rainbow, 1859
Oil on canvas, 30⅛ x 52¼ in. (76.3 x 132.7 cm.)
Gift of Leonard Granoff
National Museum of American Art
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Robert Scott Duncanson was among the many artists of the mid-nineteenth century who wished to celebrate the American landscape as a symbol of national pride. Working in Cincinnati, "Queen City of the West," he gained the fellowship of artists who searched the countryside for scenes of awe-inspiring beauty. Popular literature and philosophy spoke of the uplifting and regenerating forces of nature, and the untouched forests and mountains of the American landscape seemed close to the creative principles that ordered the universe.

Intent on developing themselves as people of culture, wealthy and middle-class Americans covered their walls with portraits, still lifes, and views of popular sites. Although these paintings had American landscapes as their subjects, they were painted according to the rules of composition and painterly techniques originated in Europe.

In his panoramic view, *Landscape with Rainbow*, Duncanson captured many of the ideas and delights of his contemporaries. He chose a scene that emphasizes the vastness and diversity of America. The wide planes, the low horizon, and the large expanse of crystalline blue sky give us an illusion of space. In the distance, a broad river reflects the sky and nearby riverbanks. By contrast, the tiny figures of the girl and boy in the middle ground are overwhelmed by the scale of their surroundings, yet the wandering cattle and the cottage at the right suggest that man is living in harmony with nature. Although the craggy bluff with its dense trees seems uninhabited, a small white structure in the far distance again indicates human presence.

Evidently, it has just rained. The partial arc of the rainbow at right is not only a beautiful detail that balances the form of the large tree at the left, but also a reminder of the presence of God's spirit. Like his contemporaries, Duncanson succeeded in portraying the American countryside while at the same time transforming this scene into a persuasive image of the blessed state of this land. While the view is distinctly American, the technique—the careful balance of forms and light and the manner in which mountains, trees, and grasses are delicately outlined—is based upon long-standing European traditions. As such, this painting demonstrates Duncanson's skillful integration of content and technique that was the basis of his success as an artist.

Edward Mitchell Bannister
(1828–1901)

Woman Walking Down Path, 1882
Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 in. (51.0 x 76.0 cm.)
Gift of Joseph Sinclair
National Museum of American Art
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Edward Mitchell Bannister's landscapes suggest the artist's delight in the intimate moods of nature. Inspired by the work of French landscape artists, Bannister and his associates were interested in creating images that conveyed their personal responses to natural settings.

Bannister painted *Woman Walking Down Path* six years after he was awarded a first-prize medal at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. At the height of his career, he was less concerned with a careful depiction of the scene before him than with recreating from memory an evocation of a particular moment. This painting does not celebrate a famous site, nor does it inspire us to dream of a great destiny, but captures a serene moment from everyday life. The composition is arranged in three horizontal bands: the field in the foreground, the forest in the middle distance, and the brilliant sky lit by the fading rays of the evening sun. Only the trees interrupt this pattern, and the path leads the eye into the distance, while the figure of the woman and the flock of sheep return our attention to the foreground. The paint is thickly applied in heavy strokes of greens, blues, and grays, and the sky is broadly illuminated by creamy whites infused with pinks and reds. The approaching darkness is hinted by the darker blue-green clouds at the very top of the painting.

Bannister's work is suggestive rather than direct. Perhaps he introduced the distant female figure to give us a sense of scale, perhaps he wished to allude to human presence—as if he were inviting us to place ourselves in this scene or to recall our own experience of such an evening.

Edmonia Lewis
(1843/45–after 1911)

Hagar, 1875
Marble, 52⅝ x 15¼ x 17 in.
(133.6 x 38.8 x 43.1 cm.)
Gift of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
National Museum of American Art
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Throughout her career, Edmonia Lewis created works of art that expressed her deeply felt concern for the plight of Afro-Americans and American Indians. As the child of a black father and a Chippewa Indian mother, she was extremely sensitive to the important issues of her time: slavery, abolition, and women's rights. Although she had been trained in the tradition of neo-classicism, a style inspired by the calm grandeur and balance of ancient Greek and Roman sculpture, Lewis gave her works emotion and expressive qualities which evoked strong sympathies in the viewer.

Hagar is a forceful statement of the artist's view of Afro-Americans as disinherited people. As described in the Bible, Hagar was an Egyptian servant of Abraham, patriarch of Israel. Since Abraham and his wife Sarah were childless into their old age, Sarah urged her husband to father a child by Hagar. Abraham complied and a son, Ishmael, was born. When soon afterward Sarah miraculously gave birth to Isaac, she demanded that both Hagar and her son be banished into the wilderness with only a loaf of bread and a pitcher of water. After wandering there for some time, Hagar and the child were saved by an angel who informed her that a great nation would descend from her son.

Lewis has shown Hagar with her hands clasped as if in prayer or wonder. Perhaps the artist chose to suggest the moment when the angel appears. We do not see the child, but the overturned pitcher at the woman's feet helps to emphasize the urgency and desperation of Hagar's plight. Draped in a loose tunic that would seem to offer little protection from sun or cold, Hagar stands gazing raptly, her hair pulled back and falling in waves over her shoulders.

The sculpture was one of Lewis's most successful works, and patrons commissioned copies in marble and terra cotta (a hard ceramic clay). The lines, proportions, and highly finished surface show the artist's mastery of her material. However, unlike many of her contemporaries, Lewis was more concerned with images that carried a powerful message than with concepts of ideal beauty. As was the case with several of her sculptures, Lewis chose a subject that implies both suffering and liberation, despair and hope.

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Henry Ossawa Tanner
(1859–1937)

Abraham's Oak, 1905
Oil on canvas, 21⅝ x 28⅝ in. (54.4 x 72.8 cm.)
Gift of Norman Robbins
National Museum of American Art
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Abraham's Oak is one of Henry Ossawa Tanner's many paintings and sketches illustrating specific scenes from the Bible. These works convey the artist's deep religious beliefs, which were probably inspired by his father, Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner. Numerous trips to the Holy Land, beginning in 1897, allowed Tanner to study first-hand the landscape and people of a region that had been so important to the development of Christianity. Tanner combined these careful observations, recorded in the form of sketches, with experiments in the use of expressive color. The resulting paintings are works of profound spirituality.

The subject of *Abraham's Oak* is based upon an Old Testament story. Abraham, the itinerant patriarch of the Jews, planted a grove of trees as a tangible symbol of his vow of peace taken with a neighboring ruler. According to subsequent Christian legend, this tree also symbolized the continuity of Abraham's family line down to Jesus Christ. Therefore, the painting may also be interpreted as an affirmation of Tanner's belief in the grace of God, who preserved the line through which His son would come to redeem the world.

The painting is dominated by the dark form of the massive oak with its broad branches — the most prominent feature of the stark landscape. In the right foreground two cloaked figures hurry through the night, and in the sky a brilliantly glowing moon washes the scene with a pale light. All forms are broadly sketched and the paints are applied in layered brushstrokes which barely define the objects but imply movement. The painting radiates a mysterious power, created by the vibrant contrasts of blue and silvery tones. Tanner has transformed the stark landscape into a dream-like image by diffusing recognizable forms. He also experimented by placing thin glazes over the surfaces of his paintings, thus giving them greater luminosity and creating the illusion of light dancing upon the surfaces.

The subject, or story, of this painting seems less important than these brilliant effects and the mood they evoke in the viewer. While Tanner remained a traditional artist, resisting the newer styles of the late nineteenth century, he did adopt some of the more experimental techniques of those around him. His bright and yet limited range of colors, the sketch-like quality of his paintings, and the expressive powers of his colors are telling signs that the artist lived in Paris at a time when certain artists were experimenting with radical innovations in artistic expression.

Reflections

Locate and read copies of slave narratives in order to gain insight into how slavery affected the lives of black Americans. *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass* (Boston, 1845) is a good example.

Examine the history of the Civil War by studying classroom texts. Discuss the issues which contributed to the outbreak of the war. How do you think these issues and events influenced the lives of the artists discussed in this text?

Select a general survey of American art from the reading list. Examine the works of major American landscapists, paying particular attention to how artistic styles changed from the beginning to the end of the nineteenth century. Look at works by Thomas Cole, Asher Brown Durand, Robert Scott Duncanson, John Frederick Kensett, Frederic Edwin Church, Edward Mitchell Bannister, Albert Bierstadt, Winslow Homer, George Inness, John Henry Twachtman, and William Merritt Chase. Compare and contrast their styles.

Examine the work of American neoclassical sculptors. Select examples of works by Hiram Powers, William Wetmore Story, Thomas Crawford, and John Rogers. Compare these to the work of Edmonia Lewis.

Discuss the role of women in the visual arts. Give suggestions regarding why there were fewer female artists than male artists. Discuss popular concepts of the lives of artists. How do these differ from the role ascribed to women in American society? How does the life of Edmonia Lewis depart from these role expectations?

Discuss the function of portraiture in American art. Select examples from a general survey of American art. Who was most often portrayed? Why are there fewer examples of portraits of black subjects? Why did the black artists represented in this exhibition create so few works dealing with black subjects?

Selected Reading

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Artists' Notebook
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Published on the occasion of the exhibition *Sharing Traditions: Five Black Artists in Nineteenth-Century America from the Collections of the National Museum of American Art*, organized by the National Museum of American Art and circulated by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, 1985–1988.

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Cover:

Tanner in his studio at 51 Boulevard Saint-Jacques, Paris, ca. 1900, with *Christ in the Temple* on the easel.
Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Sharing Traditions

FIVE BLACK ARTISTS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

The lives of the five Afro-Americans whose works are presented in this exhibition reflect the changing fortunes of black Americans from the time of the Revolutionary War to this country's recognition as a world power. Their art is a record of both their talent and their aim to work within the prevailing artistic trends of their times. Joshua Johnson, the untrained limner, was a successful portraitist in the Baltimore area where he painted many of the city's social elite. Robert Scott Duncanson became famous in America and Europe as a painter of romantic landscapes based on literary and poetic themes. Self-assured and calm, Edward Mitchell Bannister expressed his profoundly spiritual view of nature in intimate studies of the New England landscape. Edmonia Lewis became the first internationally famous black woman artist whose sculptures recall themes from both her Afro-American and Indian heritage. Henry Ossawa Tanner gained recognition in the United States and Europe for his contemplative, spiritual paintings that were influenced by his religious upbringing and his impressions gained during visits to the Holy Land.

As black individuals, however, they were subject to the realities confronting all Afro-Americans. They experienced slavery and the restrictions placed on free blacks; they were affected by the Civil War as well as by the harsh segregationist practices which followed Reconstruction. The importance of their achievement is heightened when we consider the formidable odds against which they struggled. Subject to oppression and racism, they found their opportunities to study and to exhibit severely limited. Their chances of selling their works to appreciative patrons depended not merely upon popular taste, but also upon the extent of potential patrons' sympathies for Afro-Americans. But in spite of these hostile conditions, they persevered, and their success is proof of the powerful force of the creative spirit which motivated each of them.

Learning about these artists as individuals has great value for all of us. We hope that this text will help students integrate these artists' lives into the larger context of American art and history. It is important that we see them not as isolated personalities but as members of the continuing tradition of the visual arts in America.

Guy C. McElroy
Curator/Assistant Director
Bethune Museum & Archives, Inc.
National Historic Site
Washington, D.C.

Joshua Johnson

Joshua Johnson was one of the few Afro-American artists working as a professional painter in the early decades of the nineteenth century. A limner, or untrained painter of portraits, he was active in Baltimore between 1796 and 1824, a time when freed blacks were beginning to develop their community life and to establish themselves as tradesmen, artisans, and merchants. Living in a city that had a large population of free blacks, Johnson may have been a former slave or indentured servant trained by an artist or artisan. We do know that his addresses were listed in the section of Baltimore where furniture decorators lived and worked, that he was an itinerant artist, and that his success enabled him to raise a family and own property.

Among the individual portraits and family groups attributed to Johnson are paintings of prominent citizens of Baltimore. In spite of the social and legal restrictions placed upon the lives of black people, Johnson was able to find white patrons—successful merchants, sea captains, and their families—for whom a fine portrait was more important than the artist's race.

Johnson's own advertisement in 1798 introduced him as a "self-taught genius" who had "experienced many insuperable obstacles." While offering us a glimpse of the struggles of all American artists working at the time, Johnson perhaps wanted us to know about the added difficulties and hardships of a black painter. Yet we also learn about the artist's pride in his work and his own assessment of his abilities.

Fig. 1. *View of Baltimore*, ca. 1811.

Johnson's paintings have the simple beauty and naive charm of early American portraiture. As was often the case with untrained artists, Johnson painted figures that appear flat and have certain inaccuracies of proportion and depth. Still, Johnson's perceptive characterization of his subjects, such as *Barbara Baker Murphy (Wife of Sea Captain)* and his attention to hair, lace, and jewelry resulted in accomplished works. Particularly endearing are portraits of children. *Catherine Anne Bowen* is shown standing in a garden, surrounded by flowers and holding cherries that symbolize her own existence as the fruit of her parents' union. Such added details, or accessories, as flowers, a house in the background, and a book or letter in a man's hand, convey to the viewer a sense of the sitter's status and occupation—a European artistic tradition of which the artist was obviously aware.

An elusive figure, Joshua Johnson offers us an intriguing look at the work of an Afro-American artist who had grown to professional status in the face of great obstacles.

Fig. 2. *Barbara Baker Murphy (Wife of Sea Captain)*, ca. 1810.

Fig. 3. Joshua Johnson's advertisement in the *Baltimore Intelligencer,* December 19, 1798.

Fig. 4. *Catherine Anne Bowen*, ca. 1830–32.

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Robert Scott Duncanson

Endowed by nature with the highest poetic conceptions . . . he deserves the greater appreciation that he never forgot the kindly word and generous sympathy for the humblest beginner who sought advice from the rich storehouse of his experience.

—Tribute to Duncanson, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, December 1872.

A celebrated painter of romantic landscapes, Robert Scott Duncanson was a highly educated, cultured man whose art reflects his deep knowledge and love of English, Irish, and Scottish literature. His idyllic scenes of American and European landscapes based on literary themes caused him to be praised as the "best landscape painter in the West" by American nineteenth-century newspapers. Born in upstate New York in 1821 or 1822, he was the son of a white Scottish-Canadian father and a black mother. It is believed that the family soon moved to Canada to avoid racial discrimination. Around 1841, however, Duncanson settled near Cincinnati, Ohio, a flourishing city that had also grown into a lively center for the arts.

Nothing is known about the artist's training, but Duncanson's name appears as early as 1842 in Cincinnati exhibition catalogues listing his portraits, genre scenes from everyday life, and his copies of popular prints. His interest in landscapes was probably stimulated by the presence of many established landscape painters who were attracted by the local scenery as much as by the prospects of wealthy patrons. Several of Duncanson's early paintings of scenes near Cincinnati help us follow the artist's development. At the same time he created a number of portraits commissioned by white patrons who were active in the anti-slavery movement. During the 1840s and 1850s Duncanson made daguerreotypes—early photographs produced on silver-coated copper plates. He was hired by James P. Ball, a prosperous black daguerreotypist, to create paintings after these images which were displayed in his lavish exhibition hall—then the largest in the American West.

A commission to paint eight large murals for a Cincinnati art patron advanced Duncanson's career. Depicting various landscapes and still lifes, these paintings decorated the walls of the mansion's main entrance. The murals displayed the artist's talent as well as his knowledge of American and European styles which he could have acquired by studying the paintings of artists working in Cincinnati or by copying prints after works of European masters—a common practice at the time. By the end of the 1850s, Duncanson was a well-recognized artist who maintained studios in Detroit and on Cincinnati's thriving Fourth Street.

In 1853 Duncanson visited Europe where he was greatly inspired by the paintings of English, French, and Italian masters. In addition to new insights, this exposure helped him to measure his own accomplishments:

My trip to Europe has to some extent enabled me to judge of my own talent. Of all the landscapes I saw (and I saw thousands) I do not feel discouraged.

—Letter to his friend Junius R. Sloan, 1854, Newberry Library, Chicago.

After his return Duncanson began to create picturesque compositions based on European

Fig. 5. Fourth and Walnut Streets, Cincinnati, Ohio, ca. 1851–54.

Fig. 6. *Loch Long*, 1867.

Fig. 7. *Ball's Great Daguerrian Gallery of the West*, 1854.

landscapes, including several views of Pompeii, but he was also fascinated by the hills, mists, and secluded lakes of his father's native Scotland, which he depicted in several idyllic scenes such as *Loch Long*.

During the Civil War the artist traveled in Canada and Europe, perhaps hoping to avoid the violence and confrontation in the world around him. In England he was received by nobility and invited to the home of the poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Returning to the United States around 1867, he resumed his successful career but suffered increasingly from a fear of failure. In 1872 Duncanson succumbed to what may have been a nervous breakdown and died within months at the Michigan State Retreat.

In his calm, poetic landscapes we see no trace of his personal turmoil. Duncanson preferred to paint his visions of America and Europe in the form of landscapes idealized by references to history and literature.

Fig. 8. *Pompeii*, 1855.

Edward Mitchell Bannister

Art is a moral power . . . revealing to us glimpses of the absolute ideal of perfect harmony.
—Edward Mitchell Bannister, *The Artist and His Critics*, 1886.

Edward Mitchell Bannister created landscapes that expressed his deeply felt sense of nature's spiritual power. A warm and gentle man, he was recognized and accepted in the artistic circles of Boston and Providence at a time when other black artists often left the country to avoid the harsh experience of racism.

Bannister was born in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, Canada, in 1828. His father was a black man from Barbados and his mother is believed to have been a white resident of St. Andrews. Bannister remembered that "she it was who encouraged and fostered my childish propensities for drawing and coloring."

In 1848 Bannister moved to Boston, where he worked at various menial jobs, since blacks faced restrictions in their choice of occupations. Still, Boston was a center for anti-slavery activities as well as a city that offered a rich cultural life for a developing artist, and Bannister did not let his work deter him from painting.

His marriage in 1857 to Christiana Carteaux, the owner of several successful hair salons, gave Bannister emotional support and probably the economic freedom to pursue his

Fig. 9. Edward Mitchell Bannister, ca. 1875.

career as an artist. A "strikingly handsome couple," they were active in groups seeking an end to racial oppression and participated in many cultural activities of Boston's black community. Before their marriage, both had been members of the Histrionic Club, a black drama group that rehearsed at Christiana Carteaux's hair salon, and Bannister, a fine tenor, sang in the Crispus Attucks Choir.

Soon Bannister had his own studio and was exhibiting at the Boston Art Club. With the exception of some evening art courses, he was self-taught, observing the work of fellow artists and studying paintings, especially those of the French nineteenth-century landscapists with whom he shared a profound appreciation of nature's quiet beauty.

Moving to Providence, Rhode Island, in 1870, Bannister became a welcome member of the local art community, exhibited extensively, and entered his painting *Under the Oaks* in the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. After the judges awarded the painting a first-place bronze medal, they were shocked to find that its creator was black. Bannister's prize, the first national art award won by an Afro-American, represented both a personal triumph and a challenge to prevailing nineteenth-century attitudes.

His success at the Exposition secured the artist's reputation. Bannister sold his paintings frequently and at good prices. Taking as his subjects the countryside surrounding Providence, Bannister created numerous landscapes executed in broad brushstrokes and muted tones. Among his portraits is a likeness of his wife. His genre scenes, paintings of subjects from everyday life, include *Newspaper Boy*, a painting of a handsome young man believed to be a mulatto. Although the theme of the newspaper boy was a common one, suggesting enterprise and hard work, Bannister's choice

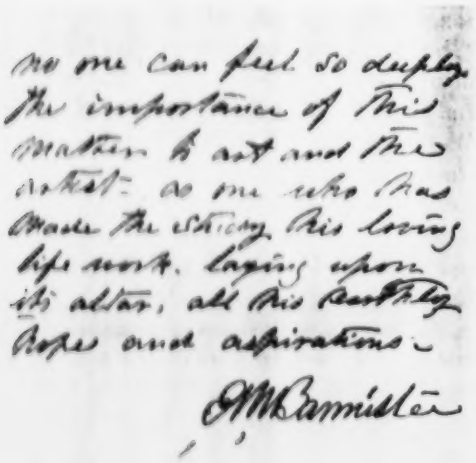
of a black youth was unusual.

Well-established and well-loved, Bannister was a co-founder of the Providence Art Club in 1880 and continued painting and speaking on various subjects in the arts until his death in 1901. Always a religious man, he died while praying at church. Months later the Providence Art Club mounted an exhibition in his honor, and artists and friends commissioned a gravesite monument — moving gestures of their high regard for the artist.

This pure and lofty soul who, while he portrayed nature, walked with God.

— From the inscription on Bannister's gravesite monument, 1901.

Fig. 11. Closing statement of Bannister's essay, *The Artist and His Critics*, 1880.



no one can feel so deeply the importance of this matter to art and the artist as one who has made the choice, his loving life work, laying upon its altar, all his earthly hopes and aspirations.

J. H. Bannister

Fig. 10. Unidentified friends and fellow artists at the dedication of Bannister's gravesite monument, November 1901.

Fig. 12. *Christiana Carteaux Bannister*, undated.

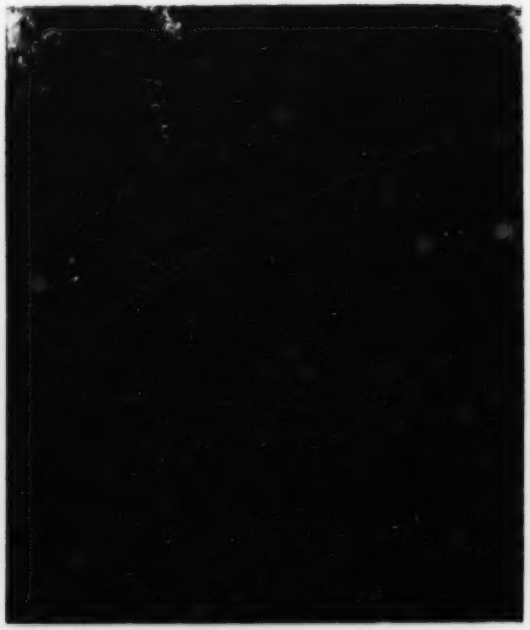


Fig. 13. *Newspaper Boy*, 1869.

Edmonia Lewis

Proud, tenacious, and fiercely independent, Edmonia Lewis was the first black woman to become an internationally known artist. Her development from a child living with Indian tribes to a respected artist in Rome was extraordinary.

Lewis was born in New York state or Greenbigh, Ohio, around 1843 or 1845. Her father was a black "gentleman's servant" and her mother a Chippewa Indian. Orphaned at age three, the child lived with her mother's tribe, moving from place to place in the forests of upstate New York and making baskets and moccasins which the tribe sold in nearby cities. Lewis, whose Indian name was Wildfire, formed a close bond of friendship with her brother Sunrise, who supported her both financially and emotionally throughout her turbulent life.

In 1859 Sunrise, who had become a gold prospector, enrolled Lewis in Oberlin College, one of the first American schools to accept women and blacks. There she studied until 1863, making friends and being exposed to important issues of abolitionism, women's rights, and social reform. Unfortunately, Lewis's stay at Oberlin was marred when she was falsely accused of poisoning two white schoolmates, a lengthy controversy during which vigilantes brutally beat her. After a spectacular trial, Lewis was found innocent, but she soon left Oberlin for Boston.

Shortly thereafter Lewis decided that she wanted to become a sculptor. With the help of friends she found a teacher, Edward Brackett, who gave her fragments of sculpture to copy in clay which he would later critique. Lewis's busts of celebrated Civil War heroes and noted anti-slavery activists demonstrated her undeniable talent and were well received by Boston's leading citizens. In 1864 the artist completed a bust of Robert Gould Shaw, a martyred white hero who had led a company of black soldiers. By selling copies of this work and of a commemorative medallion of John Brown, Lewis was able to finance her move to Rome in 1865.

Fig. 14. Edmonia Lewis, Chicago, 1870 (?).

An exotic figure in Rome, she joined the circle of expatriate American artists, writers, and performers. She established a studio near the Piazza Barberini, and gradually her work began to reflect her study of ancient Greek and Roman statuary. Initially, however, she derived her subjects from her Indian and Afro-American heritage and created sculpture groups entitled "Forever Free" and "The Freed Woman and Her Child." *Old Arrow Maker* is one of several works on an Indian theme, perhaps inspired by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, *The Song of Hiawatha*. This sculpture contrasts the weathered arrowmaker with his youthful daughter and, with virtuoso skill, captures in marble the various textures of human skin, fur, feathers, and rough cloth.

Lewis carved copies of classical statuary for her patrons in the United States and for sale to Americans who visited her studio. For friends and patrons she sculpted portrait busts, such as that of *Anna Quincy*

Fig. 15. Piazza Barberini, Rome, 1860s.

Waterston, a Boston poet. In 1876 Lewis exhibited her *Death of Cleopatra* at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, a marble that graphically depicted the dying queen. It created quite a stir and enhanced her reputation; her success continued well into the 1880s. Lewis's activities after that time are not clear and the date and place of her death remain unknown.

'Tis fitting that a daughter of the race
Whose chains are breaking should receive a gift
So rare as genius.

— Anna Quincy Waterston,
"Edmonia Lewis," 1864.

Fig. 16. *Old Arrow Maker*, 1872.

Fig. 17. *Anna Quincy Waterston*, ca. 1866.

Henry Ossawa Tanner

Fig. 18. *Henry Ossawa Tanner, Paris, ca. 1935.*

Few Afro-American artists have enjoyed the widespread fame of Henry Ossawa Tanner. An expatriate living in Paris from 1891 until his death in 1937, he exhibited regularly at the official salons, received numerous awards in France and the United States, and enjoyed the support of wealthy patrons.

Tanner was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1859. His father, Benjamin Tucker Tanner, was a distinguished minister and scholar who became a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Bishop Tanner and his wife, Sarah Miller Tanner, raised their children in a spirit of deep religious faith.

Even as a teenager, Tanner was intensely interested in art. After seeing a landscapist working in Philadelphia's Fairmont Park, young Tanner purchased some dry colors and brushes and set out to paint.

Don't you suppose a boy, trying to hold a canvas between his knees and mix dry colors upon a pasteboard palette, might be liable to get things mixed? Well, I did. . . . But that I was happy, supremely so, there was no doubt.

—Henry Ossawa Tanner, "The Story of An Artist's Life," *The World's Work*, 1909.

Tanner had the opportunity to study with two white artists willing to teach a young black, but the realities of segregation, which repeatedly confronted the artist in the United States, created painful memories that remained with him throughout his life.

True—this condition has driven me out of the country, but . . . while I cannot sing our National Hymn, "Land of Liberty," etc. still deep down in my heart I love it and am sometimes sad that I cannot live where my heart is.

—Tanner's letter to Mrs. Eunice Tietjens, 1914, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Frail health and his parents' wishes that he become a minister or learn a trade postponed Tanner's pursuit of an artistic career until, in 1880, he enrolled at the Pennsylvania Academy for The Fine Arts in Philadelphia. For two years he studied with Thomas Eakins, one of America's greatest artists. Under his guidance Tanner developed a sound knowledge of figure drawing and deepened his interest in depicting subjects drawn from everyday life.

After repeated failures to establish himself as an artist in America, Tanner sailed for Europe in 1891, supported by the sale of a large group of paintings to his patrons, Bishop and Mrs. Joseph Crane Hartzell. Fulfilling his wish to study abroad, Tanner settled in Paris and enrolled in the prestigious

Fig. 19. The artist's parents, Benjamin Tucker Tanner and his wife Sarah Miller Tanner, 1908.

Fig. 20. The artist's wife and son posing for Tanner's painting, *Christ Learning to Read*, ca. 1910–11.

Fig. 21. *The Savior*, ca. 1900–1905.

Fig. 22. *Palais de Justice, Tangier*, ca. 1910.

Académie Julien. He perfected his techniques and created a series of paintings with subjects from black life.

When, in 1900, Tanner was awarded the Lippincott Prize by the Pennsylvania Academy for The Fine Arts, the artist was told that his attendance at the banquet held in Philadelphia would be "indiscreet" because of his race. This incident confirmed Tanner's decision to continue living in Paris as an expatriate. While living in Paris he married Jessie Macauley Olssen in 1899, a white woman who became his beloved companion. Together with their son Jesse, born in 1903, she often posed for the religious scenes which increasingly became the subjects of Tanner's art.

Tanner's frequent trips to the Holy Land and North Africa inspired him to paint biblical themes in the setting and brilliant light of that region. Near Eastern people served as models for his painting *The Savior*, and many of his street scenes, such as *Palais de Justice, Tangier* later became the settings of his compositions, as though they were images recalled from memory.

Although he visited the United States intermittently and supported the efforts of black Americans to gain racial equality, Tanner centered his life around the art world of Paris where he remained for the rest of his life.

Nor do I forget a ride one stormy Christmas night to Bethlehem. . . . Dark clouds swept the moonlit skies and it took little imagination to . . . transpose the scene and see in each hurrying group a "Flight into Egypt."

— Henry Ossawa Tanner, "The Story of an Artist's Life," *The World's Work*, 1909.

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